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C O N F I D E N T I A L VATICAN 000195

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EUR/WE AND WHA/CCA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/10/2013

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [VT](#)

SUBJECT: (C) PAYA VISITS POPE; FM TAURAN MAY RECIPROCATE

REF: A) FROWICK/NIGRO EMAIL JANUARY 10 B) HAVANA 01235

CLASSIFIED BY: POLOFF GHFROWICK REASON EO 12958 1.5 (B,D).

[11.](#) (C) VATICAN CARIBBEAN AFFAIRS DIRECTOR MONS. GIORGIO LINGUA TOLD US JANUARY 9 THAT THE HOLY SEE CONTINUES TO BE CAUTIOUS ABOUT "PRESSING THE ENVELOPE" FOR GREATER CHURCH FREEDOMS IN CUBA. HE BELIEVED THAT THE CUBAN GOVERNMENT
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WANTS TO CHANGE, BUT, LIKE THE CHINESE, ARE FEARFUL OF LOSING CONTROL. HE SAID THE POPE, WHO GREETED VARELA PROJECT AND CHRISTIAN LIBERATION MOVEMENT FOUNDER OSVALDO PAYA AT THE END OF A GENERAL AUDIENCE JANUARY 8 (REF A), WOULD NOT MEET PRIVATELY WITH HIM, AS SPECULATED IN THE PRESS, BECAUSE THE CHURCH DID NOT WISH TO PROVOKE A NEGATIVE REACTION FROM THE CUBAN GOVERNMENT. PAYA REPORTEDLY EXPRESSED SATISFACTION WITH THE BRIEF ENCOUNTER, CLAIMING "ONE CANNOT ASPIRE FOR MORE IN AN IMPROVISED TRIP WITHOUT A FIXED AGENDA."

[12.](#) (C) IN HIS CONVERSATIONS WITH THE CUBAN EMBASSY TO THE HOLY SEE, LINGUA SAYS HE HAS PRESSED THE CUBANS TO CULTIVATE PAYA AS A "SOFT OPPOSITIONIST." ACCORDING TO LINGUA, THE CUBAN EMBASSY CONSISTENTLY REPLIES BY DOWNPLAYING THE INFLUENCE OF THE OPPOSITION. LINGUA SAID PAYA WAS A COMMITTED CATHOLIC WHO WISHES TO WORK FOR CHANGE WITHIN CUBA'S SYSTEM. HE TOLD US THAT WHEN THE CASTRO GOVERNMENT REBUFFED THE VARELA PROJECT WITH THE REFERENDUM REAFFIRMING THE SOCIALIST CONSTITUTION, PAYA TOLD THE CHURCH HE WAS HAPPY THAT HIS APPROACH OF "USING THE CONSTITUTION ITSELF" HAD BEEN "REAFFIRMED."

[13.](#) (C) QUERIED ON WHETHER THE CHURCH WAS CONTENT WITH THE PACE OF CHANGE IN CUBA, LINGUA TOLD US THE CHURCH ASSIDUOUSLY AVOIDS POLITICAL ACTIVISM, SO AS TO PROTECT SPACE FOR ITS PASTORAL WORK. HE TOLD US THE GOC HAD COMPLAINED ON OCCASION ABOUT THE CHURCH'S LIBRARIES, AND SOMETIMES IT REFUSED OR RESTRICTED VISAS FOR CLERGY, BUT LINGUA DID NOT SIGNAL THAT THE CHURCH WOULD TAKE THOSE RESTRICTIONS AS SERIOUSLY AS THEY HAVE TAKEN THE RUSSIANS' SIMILAR ACTIONS (NOTE: THE POPE HIMSELF DECRIED THE RUSSIAN VISA REFUSALS IN HIS ANNUAL
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ADDRESS TO THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS JANUARY 13).

[14.](#) (C) LINGUA MENTIONED THAT THIS MONTH MARKS THE FIVE YEAR ANNIVERSARY OF THE POPE'S GROUNDBREAKING VISIT TO CUBA. HE TOLD US (PROTECT) THAT THE GOC HAD INVITED THE POPE AND/OR FM TAURAN TO VISIT THE ISLAND TO TAKE PLACE IN COMMEMORATIVE EVENTS. LINGUA BELIEVED TAURAN WOULD ACCEPT THE INVITATION, BUT WOULD KEEP THE VISIT LOW-KEY AND TRY TO COMBINE IT WITH PASTORAL VISITS TO CUBA'S BELEAGUERED BISHOPS. EMBASSY WILL CERTAINLY ENCOURAGE TAURAN TO MEET WITH PAYA AND OTHER DISSIDENTS IF SUCH A VISIT WERE TO TAKE PLACE. WE NOTE FROM LOCAL PRESS ACCOUNTS AS WELL AS REF B THAT CUBAN CARDINAL JAIME ORTEGA RECENTLY LAMENTED PUBLICLY IN CUBA THE LACK OF PROGRESS SINCE THE POPE'S VISIT, ASSERTING THAT THERE WAS NO SUBSTANTIAL CHANGE SINCE 1998, THAT SOCIAL-POLITICAL SPACE REMAINED LIMITED, AND THAT THE CHURCH CONTINUED TO BE IGNORED.
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